

# The Role of Libraries in Combating Misinformation and Promoting Digital Citizenship in The Social Media Era in Cross River State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The proliferation of social media and digital platforms has led to an unprecedented spread of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, threatening democratic values and public decision-making. Libraries, as trusted information institutions, have a critical role to play in addressing this challenge. This paper employs a conceptual and policy-analysis approach to explore the role of libraries in combating misinformation and promoting digital citizenship in the social media era. Grounded in the Media and Information Literacy Framework and the Digital Citizenship Model, the paper examines how libraries can leverage information literacy programs, fact-checking services, digital content curation, and community engagement to equip users with critical evaluation skills. The discussion also highlights the ethical responsibility of librarians as gatekeepers and educators in the digital space. Findings from reviewed literature reveal that libraries are uniquely positioned to foster responsible online behaviour, media literacy, and civic participation. However, limited funding, inadequate training, and lack of clear policy frameworks hinder effective intervention. The paper concludes that repositioning libraries as centres for digital citizenship education is essential. It recommends collaboration with government, NGOs, and schools, and the integration of misinformation literacy into library programs and school curricula.

**Keywords:** Libraries, Misinformation, Digital Citizenship, Social Media, Information Literacy, 21st Century

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## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital technologies and social media platforms has precipitated a paradigmatic shift in the global information ecosystem. Information that previously passed through institutional gatekeepers such as editors, publishers, and librarians can now be produced, modified, and disseminated instantaneously by any individual with access to a connected device (Castells, 2015). This democratisation of information production has engendered significant benefits, including increased civic participation, broader access to educational resources, and the amplification of marginalised voices (Jenkins, 2016). However, it has also precipitated what Wardle and Derakhshan (2018) describe as an "information disorder" characterised by the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information across networked publics.

Misinformation refers to false information shared without intent to harm, while disinformation denotes false information deliberately created and disseminated to deceive, and mal-information refers to genuine information shared to cause harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018). The virality of such content is often exacerbated by

algorithmic curation, emotional resonance, and confirmation bias within echo chambers (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Empirical studies have demonstrated that false news spreads significantly faster, deeper, and more broadly than true news on social media platforms (Vosoughi et al., 2018), with profound implications for public health, democratic governance, and social cohesion.

In the Nigerian context, the penetration of digital media has been both rapid and transformative. As of 2023, Nigeria had an estimated 122.5 million internet users, with social media platforms constituting the primary source of news for over 60% of urban youth (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023; Statista, 2023). In Cross River State, a geopolitical entity in the South-South region of Nigeria with a population of approximately 3.8 million (NBS, 2022), social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok serve as critical conduits for information dissemination among students, traders, civil servants, and community leaders. Calabar, the state capital, functions as an administrative and educational hub, while semi-urban and rural areas such as Ikom, Ogoja, and Ugep are increasingly connected through

mobile internet infrastructure (Cross River State Government [CRSG], 2020).

However, this increased connectivity has been accompanied by significant challenges. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, Cross River State experienced widespread circulation of false claims regarding the efficacy of unproven herbal remedies and conspiracy theories about vaccine safety, which contributed to vaccine hesitancy and public distrust in health institutions (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020; Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2022). Similarly, during electoral cycles, the dissemination of doctored images and fabricated narratives on social media has been implicated in the escalation of communal tensions and the undermining of electoral integrity (CDD, 2022). The absence of robust fact-checking mechanisms and the limited media literacy among segments of the population exacerbate the susceptibility of citizens to manipulative information campaigns (Akinyemi, Ojo, & Bello, 2020).

The implications of this information disorder extend beyond individual decision-making to the very fabric of democratic society. Habermas (2006) posits that a functional public sphere requires citizens who can engage in rational-critical discourse based on verifiable information. When the information environment is polluted by falsehoods, the capacity for informed deliberation is compromised, leading to what Sunstein (2017) terms "epistemic fragmentation." In developing economies such as Nigeria, where institutional trust is already fragile, the corrosive effects of misinformation can further erode social capital and impede development outcomes in health, agriculture, and governance (Okoro & Emmanuel, 2021). In response to these challenges, the concept of digital citizenship has gained traction in both scholarly and policy discourse. Ribble (2015) defines digital citizenship as the norms of appropriate and responsible behavior with regard to technology use, encompassing nine elements: digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. Central to this framework is the cultivation of critical competencies that enable individuals to navigate, evaluate, and contribute to digital environments ethically and effectively (Mossberger, Tolbert, & McNeal, 2007). UNESCO (2021) further operationalizes these competencies through its Media and Information Literacy [MIL] Framework, which emphasizes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms.

Despite the recognized importance of digital citizenship, evidence suggests that formal mechanisms for its cultivation remain underdeveloped in Nigeria. The national education curriculum has only recently begun to integrate elements of digital literacy, and implementation at the state level remains uneven (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2019). Adult populations, particularly in states like Cross River, often acquire digital skills informally, without exposure to frameworks for critical evaluation or ethical online engagement (Oduwale & Oyewole, 2021). This gap creates a vacuum that misinformation readily occupies.

It is within this milieu that libraries assume renewed significance. As institutions historically mandated to organize, preserve, and provide access to information, libraries possess both the epistemic authority and the public trust necessary to intervene in the contemporary information crisis (American Library Association [ALA], 2019). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, 2018) has explicitly positioned libraries as key actors in the promotion of media and information literacy, arguing that librarians are uniquely qualified to teach evaluation skills and to curate authoritative information resources. In the digital age, this role has evolved from mere provision of access to active facilitation of critical engagement with information (Lankes, 2016).

In Cross River State, the library ecosystem comprises academic libraries, public libraries, school libraries, and community information centers. Notable institutions include the Cross River University of Technology Library, the University of Calabar Library, and libraries under the Cross River State Library Board (CRSG, 2020). These institutions are strategically located to serve diverse populations and are perceived as neutral and non-partisan spaces. However, their capacity to respond to the challenges of misinformation is constrained by systemic factors. Empirical studies in Nigeria have documented chronic underfunding, dilapidated ICT infrastructure, inadequate professional development for librarians, and the absence of policy frameworks that explicitly mandate libraries to engage in digital citizenship education (Omeluzor et al., 2017; Akinyemi et al., 2020).

Globally, libraries have begun to reposition themselves as frontline responders to misinformation. The American Library Association (2019) has developed media literacy toolkits for public libraries, while IFLA (2022) has issued guidelines on how libraries can identify and counter disinformation. In Africa, initiatives in Kenya and Ghana have seen national libraries partner with fact-checking organisations to deliver MIL training to

journalists and students (UNESCO, 2022). In Nigeria, the National Library of Nigeria has initiated digital literacy programs, but state-level implementation, particularly in Cross River, remains limited (National Library of Nigeria [NLN], 2021).

Given this context, there is an urgent need to reconceptualise the role of libraries in Cross River State. This paper argues that libraries must transition from passive repositories of print materials to active agents of digital empowerment. Libraries can design and deliver interventions that equip citizens with the skills to identify misinformation, engage responsibly online, and participate constructively in civic life. This requires not only professional reorientation but also policy support, inter-institutional collaboration, and sustained investment in library infrastructure and human capital. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to examine the role of libraries in combating misinformation and promoting digital citizenship in the social media era in Cross River State, Nigeria

#### **UNDERSTANDING MISINFORMATION AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA**

The digital transformation of the 21st century has redefined how people in Cross River State and across Nigeria access and share information. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X, TikTok, and YouTube have displaced traditional gatekeepers and placed the power of publishing directly in the hands of citizens (Castells, 2015). This shift has expanded civic participation and provided new channels for education and advocacy. At the same time, it has created an environment where information can be produced and circulated instantly without verification or editorial oversight. The result is an information ecosystem that is both highly connected and highly vulnerable to distortion.

Within this ecosystem, scholars distinguish between three forms of information disorder: misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information. Misinformation refers to false information shared without intent to harm, often arising from genuine mistakes or poor evaluation skills. Disinformation is false information deliberately created and spread to deceive, manipulate public opinion, or incite division. Mal-information involves the use of genuine information to cause harm, such as leaking private data to harass individuals (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2018). This typology is important because each category requires a different intervention. Research on platform dynamics shows that false content spreads significantly faster and reaches larger audiences than accurate content because it is more novel and emotionally

provocative (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). In practice, this means that by the time a correction is issued, the false narrative may have already shaped public perception.

In Nigeria, the impact of this disorder is evident across multiple sectors. With over 122 million internet users as of 2023, Nigeria ranks among the highest in Africa for social media penetration, and platforms serve as the primary news source for a majority of youths (NBS, 2023; Statista, 2023). In Cross River State, WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and TikTok videos are routinely used to disseminate information about government programs, health campaigns, and community events in Calabar, Ikom, Ogoja, and Ugep. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the state experienced widespread circulation of unverified claims about herbal cures, vaccine side effects, and conspiracy theories linking 5G to the virus. These narratives contributed to vaccine hesitancy and undermined public health messaging from state and federal authorities (WHO, 2020). During election cycles, manipulated images and fabricated endorsements have also been used to influence voters and to heighten ethnic and religious tensions, particularly in the lead-up to the 2019 and 2023 general elections (CDD, 2022). The speed and reach of these messages often outpace the capacity of government agencies and traditional media to provide timely rebuttals.

Several structural and behavioural factors explain why misinformation thrives in this environment. First, social media algorithms are optimised for engagement rather than accuracy. Content that generates strong reactions such as anger, fear, or surprise is prioritised, which inadvertently amplifies falsehoods (Pariser, 2011). Second, the cost of content production has collapsed. Any individual with a smartphone can create and distribute multimedia content to thousands of people without editorial review (Jenkins, 2016). Third, cognitive biases play a significant role. People are more likely to believe and share information that confirms their existing beliefs, and repeated exposure increases perceived truthfulness regardless of accuracy (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Finally, in contexts where trust in government and traditional media is low, citizens often turn to peer networks for information, even when those networks lack credibility. In Cross River State, this is compounded by uneven digital literacy and inconsistent internet access in rural local government areas, which limits exposure to fact-checking resources (CRSG, 2020).

To counter these challenges, the concept of digital citizenship has gained prominence in both policy and academic discourse. Digital citizenship refers to the ability to engage with digital technologies in ways that are safe,

responsible, and ethical. Ribble's framework identifies nine elements organised around respect, education, and protection, with digital literacy, digital law, and digital rights and responsibilities being most relevant to misinformation (Ribble, 2015). Digital literacy involves the capacity to find, evaluate, and create information. Digital law addresses understanding of legal norms online, including defamation and cybercrime. Digital rights and responsibilities emphasize the obligations that come with participation in online communities. Together, these elements provide a foundation for responsible behaviour in digital spaces.

UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Framework complements this by outlining five competencies: access, evaluation, creation, reflection, and action (UNESCO, 2021). Media and information literacy is not limited to technical skills. It requires critical thinking, cultural awareness, and the ability to recognise bias and propaganda. In the context of misinformation, MIL provides the tools for citizens to pause before sharing, to cross-check sources, and to understand the motivations behind content. Empirical studies in Africa have shown that MIL interventions improve the ability of students and adults to identify false news and to resist manipulation (UNESCO, 2022).

In the Nigerian context, digital citizenship is still in the early stages of institutionalisation. The National Policy on ICT in Education recognises digital literacy as a priority, but implementation at the state level remains uneven, with rural areas lagging behind urban centres (FME, 2019). Research in South-South Nigeria indicates that most adults learn digital skills informally and have limited training in source evaluation or online ethics (Oduwale & Oyewole, 2021). In Cross River State, this gap is visible in how information circulates. Youth are highly active online but often lack guidance on verifying content. Community WhatsApp groups frequently share health advice, political rumours, and financial schemes without scrutiny. During elections, young voters are targeted with micro-targeted disinformation that exploits local identities and grievances (CDD, 2022). A localised approach to digital citizenship is therefore necessary one that addresses misinformation in Pidgin English and local languages, that recognises the role of closed messaging apps, and that incorporates Nigerian legal frameworks such as the Cybercrimes Act of 2015.

The relationship between misinformation and digital citizenship is cyclical. Low levels of digital citizenship make populations more susceptible to misinformation, and the spread of misinformation further erodes the norms of responsible online behaviour. When

citizens cannot agree on basic facts, democratic deliberation becomes difficult, and trust in institutions declines (Sunstein, 2017). In Cross River State, this has practical consequences. False information about agricultural inputs can lead to crop loss. Rumours about government palliatives can lead to civil unrest. Health misinformation can reduce uptake of essential services. Reversing these trends requires institutions that are trusted, accessible, and capable of delivering sustained education.

Two theoretical frameworks anchor this study. The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Framework provides the cognitive foundation for teaching evaluation and critical thinking. Ribble's Digital Citizenship Model provides the behavioural foundation for teaching ethics and responsibility online. Together, they suggest that addressing misinformation requires both skill and disposition. Libraries are uniquely positioned to deliver both. As public institutions with a mandate for free access to information, libraries have historically served as spaces for learning, inquiry, and civic engagement. In the digital era, that mandate extends to teaching citizens how to navigate information disorder and how to participate responsibly online.

#### **LIBRARIES AS TRUSTED INSTITUTIONS FOR MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

In an information environment characterised by overload and distortion, public trust has become one of the scarcest resources. Citizens in Cross River State, like elsewhere in Nigeria, are confronted daily with conflicting claims on social media regarding health, politics, education, and security. In this context, institutions that are perceived as neutral, credible, and committed to the public good assume heightened importance. Libraries have historically occupied this position. As institutions mandated to collect, organize, preserve, and provide access to information, libraries are widely regarded as non-partisan spaces dedicated to intellectual freedom and equitable access (ALA, 2019). This reputation, built over decades of service, positions libraries as critical actors in addressing the contemporary challenge of misinformation through the promotion of media and information literacy (IFLA, 2018).

The conceptual link between libraries and information literacy is well established. The American Library Association defines information literacy as the set of abilities required to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and use it effectively (ALA, 2019). This definition aligns directly with the competencies needed to navigate the social media era. While the term "media and information literacy" broadens



the scope to include film, radio, television, and digital platforms, the core skills remain the same: critical evaluation, ethical use, and responsible creation of information (UNESCO, 2021). The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions has explicitly positioned libraries as central to the delivery of MIL, arguing that librarians possess the professional expertise to teach evaluation skills and to curate authoritative resources that citizens can rely on in an age of uncertainty (IFLA, 2022). This role has evolved from the traditional function of book lending to an active educational mandate (Lankes, 2016).

In Nigeria, and specifically in Cross River State, libraries exist across academic, public, and school settings. The Cross River University of Technology Library, the University of Calabar Library, and libraries under the Cross River State Library Board constitute the formal library infrastructure in the state (CRSG, 2020). Beyond these, school libraries and community resource centers serve as access points for students and residents in Calabar, Ikom, Ogoja, and other towns. Although funding and infrastructure challenges have limited their reach, these institutions retain a level of public trust that is often lacking in other information intermediaries. Studies of library use in Nigeria indicate that citizens continue to view libraries as safe spaces for learning and inquiry, particularly for students and job seekers who lack access to paid information services (Omeluzor et al., 2017). This trust is a strategic asset in the fight against misinformation. Libraries contribute to media and information literacy through four primary functions.

First, they provide direct instruction. Academic and public libraries in Nigeria have begun to incorporate information literacy into their orientation programs and workshops (Akinyemi, Ojo, & Bello, 2020). These sessions teach students and community members how to search databases, evaluate website credibility, and distinguish between scholarly and popular sources. In the context of social media, this instruction can be extended to include skills such as reverse image search, fact-checking using platforms like Dubawa and Africa Check, and identifying manipulation techniques such as deepfakes and clickbait. The UNESCO MIL Framework provides a useful guide for structuring this instruction around the competencies of access, evaluation, creation, reflection, and action (UNESCO, 2021).

Second, libraries serve as curators of verified information. In an era where algorithms prioritize engagement over accuracy, libraries can act as human-curated alternatives (Pariser, 2011). By developing subject guides, resource portals, and digital repositories focused

on local issues such as health, agriculture, and civic education, libraries in Cross River State can provide residents with reliable information that counters viral falsehoods. For example, during a disease outbreak, the library could maintain a portal linking to WHO, NCDC, and Cross River State Ministry of Health updates (WHO, 2020). This curatorial role is consistent with the library's historical mandate to organize knowledge for public use, but it now requires digital tools and partnerships with health and government agencies (Lankes, 2016).

Third, libraries function as community engagement hubs. Unlike classrooms that serve only enrolled students, public libraries are open to all residents. This makes them ideal venues for MIL campaigns targeting adults, market women, civil servants, and youth who may not be reached through formal education (IFLA, 2022). Libraries can partner with NGOs, faith-based organizations, and media houses to hold town hall meetings, radio programs, and social media live sessions on topics such as identifying fake news and practising responsible sharing. Evidence from other African countries shows that library-led community programs increase public awareness of misinformation and improve citizens' confidence in evaluating online content (UNESCO, 2022). In Kenya, for instance, national library services have collaborated with fact-checking organisations to train journalists and students on verification techniques.

Fourth, librarians themselves model digital citizenship. As professionals bound by a code of ethics that emphasises intellectual freedom, privacy, and service, librarians demonstrate the norms of responsible information behaviour (ALA, 2019). When library social media pages share only verified content, when librarians correct misinformation respectfully in community forums, and when libraries provide free internet access with guidance on safe use, they embody the principles outlined in Ribble's Digital Citizenship Model (Ribble, 2015). This modelling is particularly important in Cross River State, where young people often learn digital behaviour by imitation rather than formal instruction (Oduwole & Oyewole, 2021).

Despite this potential, libraries in Cross River State face significant constraints that limit their effectiveness in promoting MIL. The most persistent challenge is inadequate funding. Public and school libraries in Nigeria have historically received low budgetary allocation, resulting in dilapidated buildings, outdated collections, and lack of ICT infrastructure (Omeluzor et al., 2017). Without reliable internet and computers, libraries cannot deliver digital literacy training

or maintain online portals. A second challenge is professional capacity. Many librarians were trained in traditional librarianship and have not received continuous professional development on media literacy, digital tools, or misinformation analysis. The curriculum of library schools in Nigeria has only recently begun to integrate MIL, and in-service training remains sporadic (Akinyemi et al., 2020).

A third challenge is policy. There is currently no state-level policy in Cross River that explicitly mandates libraries to engage in misinformation response or digital citizenship education (CRSG, 2020). As a result, library activities in this area depend on the initiative of individual librarians rather than on institutional strategy. This ad-hoc approach limits scale and sustainability. Finally, there is the challenge of perception. Many citizens still view libraries primarily as places for reading and borrowing books, not as centres for digital empowerment. Changing this perception requires advocacy and visible programming that demonstrates the library's relevance to everyday digital problems.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action. At the policy level, the Cross River State Government should recognise libraries as key institutions in its digital literacy and civic education strategy. This could involve including libraries in the state's ICT master plan and allocating specific funding for MIL programs. At the institutional level, library administrators should redesign services to prioritise digital skills, fact-checking, and community outreach. This includes investing in internet connectivity, subscribing to fact-checking databases, and creating social media channels for the library to disseminate verified information. At the professional level, the Nigerian Library Association and library schools should expand training on MIL, misinformation, and digital citizenship so that librarians are equipped with current competencies.

#### **STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING MISINFORMATION THROUGH LIBRARY SERVICES**

The proliferation of misinformation in the social media era requires deliberate and context-specific responses. In Cross River State, where digital platforms serve as the primary source of information for many citizens, libraries are uniquely positioned to intervene. As trusted, public-serving institutions with an educational mandate, libraries can move beyond passive information provision to actively equip users with the skills and resources needed to identify and resist falsehoods. Drawing from the UNESCO Media and Information

Literacy Framework and Ribble's Digital Citizenship Model, this section outlines five strategic approaches through which libraries in Cross River State can combat misinformation: information literacy instruction, fact-checking and verification services, digital content curation, community engagement and partnerships, and advocacy for policy integration.

- i. **Information Literacy Instruction and Training Programs:** The most direct strategy libraries can employ is the systematic delivery of information literacy instruction. Information literacy involves teaching users how to identify information needs, locate relevant sources, evaluate credibility, and use information ethically (ALA, 2019). In the context of misinformation, this must be expanded to include media literacy skills such as analyzing the purpose and bias of social media content, recognizing manipulation techniques, and understanding how algorithms shape what users see (UNESCO, 2021). Libraries in Cross River State can institutionalize this through structured workshops for different target groups. For students in CRUTECH and UNICAL, librarians can integrate MIL modules into orientation programs and course-related instruction, focusing on academic source evaluation and the detection of predatory journals and fake news sites. For secondary school students, library staff can collaborate with teachers to deliver age-appropriate sessions on verifying WhatsApp forwards and identifying doctored images.
- ii. **Fact-Checking and Verification Services:** A second strategy is for libraries to position themselves as local fact-checking hubs. Given that misinformation often spreads rapidly during crises, citizens need a trusted place to verify claims before sharing them. Libraries can establish "Verify Before You Share" desks, both physical and virtual, where users can submit suspicious messages, images, or videos for verification (IFLA, 2022). Librarians trained in fact-checking methodologies can investigate claims using authoritative sources such as WHO, NCDC, INEC, and Cross River State Government portals, and provide feedback within 24 hours.
- iii. **Digital Content Curation and Creation of Verified Information Portals:** Algorithms on social media prioritize engagement over accuracy, often burying factual content (Pariser, 2011). Libraries can counter this by curating and creating their own

digital content. This involves developing online portals, LibGuides, and social media content that aggregates verified information on topics of public concern in Cross River State. For example, a "Cross River Civic Info Hub" hosted by the State Library Board could compile verified information on government programs, election procedures, agricultural extension services, and health campaigns. During election periods, the portal could provide links to INEC, voter education materials, and guides on identifying political disinformation (CDD, 2022).

- iv. Community Engagement, Partnerships, and Outreach: Misinformation is a community problem and therefore requires community solutions. Libraries must move beyond their walls to engage citizens where they are. This involves partnerships with schools, religious institutions, market associations, youth groups, and media houses in Cross River State (Omeluzor et al., 2017). School partnerships can ensure that MIL is embedded in the curriculum. Librarians can work with teachers to deliver media literacy lessons and to establish "Library Media Clubs" where students learn to create and critique digital content. Partnerships with faith-based organizations and community leaders are critical for reaching adults, as these leaders often serve as trusted information nodes. Libraries can provide them with talking points and verified materials to share in sermons and town hall meetings. Collaboration with local radio and television stations can amplify library messages.
- v. Finally, libraries must measure and communicate their impact. Tracking workshop attendance, website traffic, and the number of fact-check requests, libraries can provide evidence to policymakers and funders of their contribution to information integrity. This data-driven approach strengthens the case for sustained investment.

#### **PROMOTING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP AND RESPONSIBLE ONLINE BEHAVIOUR**

Digital citizenship refers to the ability to engage with digital technologies safely, ethically, and responsibly (Ribble, 2015). In Cross River State, this means equipping citizens with skills to evaluate information, communicate respectfully online, and understand their rights and obligations under Nigerian law, including the Cybercrimes Act (2015). With high social media use among youths and limited formal training, many users learn digital behavior

informally, which increases vulnerability to misinformation, cyberbullying, and fraud (Oduwale & Oyewole, 2021). UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Framework further emphasises critical evaluation, reflection, and action as key competencies (UNESCO, 2021). For Cross River State, digital citizenship must therefore be localised to address realities such as WhatsApp group dynamics, use of Pidgin English, and communal patterns of information sharing. This ensures that global frameworks are relevant to local cultural and technological contexts.

#### **5.2 Libraries as Spaces for Digital Citizenship Education**

Libraries are trusted institutions that have historically promoted civic values such as equity, access, and intellectual freedom (ALA, 2019). In the digital era, this role extends to teaching responsible online behaviour.

Academic libraries in CRUTECH and UNICAL can integrate digital citizenship into orientation and information literacy programs. In contrast, public libraries can run community workshops on cyber safety, online etiquette, and responsible sharing. School libraries can also collaborate with teachers to embed these lessons in the curriculum as outlined in the National ICT in Education Policy (FME, 2019). Providing free internet access with guidance, libraries create safe spaces for learning digital skills. Through structured programs, libraries can reach students, adults, and community leaders who might otherwise lack exposure to formal digital citizenship training. This positions libraries as central hubs for building a more informed and responsible digital public in Cross River State.

- i. Teaching the Nine Elements Through Library Programs: Ribble's nine elements of digital citizenship provide a practical framework for library programming (Ribble, 2015). Libraries can teach digital literacy through evaluation and content creation workshops, digital etiquette through campaigns on respectful communication, and digital law by educating users on privacy, copyright, and the Cybercrimes Act. They can also address digital health and security by offering sessions on data protection and avoiding online scams, which are increasingly common in Nigeria (NBS, 2023). By aligning programs with these elements, libraries move beyond access provision to active education. Practical activities such as fact-checking exercises, content creation labs, and discussions on online rights help citizens internalize responsible behaviour. This approach

- ensures that digital citizenship is taught not as theory but as everyday practice.
- ii. **Modelling Responsible Behaviour and Creating Positive Online Communities:** Libraries must model the behaviour they seek to promote. When library staff share verified information, engage respectfully online, and uphold privacy and intellectual freedom, they demonstrate digital citizenship in action (IFLA, 2022). Library social media pages and WhatsApp channels can serve as examples of credible and respectful communication, helping to counter the culture of misinformation and toxicity online. Libraries can also create moderated online communities where citizens discuss local issues under professional guidance. These spaces reduce echo chambers and expose users to diverse, credible viewpoints (Sunstein, 2017). Recognising positive digital behaviour through awards or campaigns, libraries reinforce norms of responsibility and make digital citizenship a visible community value.
  - iii. **Partnerships and Scaling Impact:** No single institution can promote digital citizenship alone. Libraries in Cross River State should partner with the Ministry of Education, NGOs, media houses, and civil society to scale their programs (FME, 2019). Collaboration with schools ensures that digital citizenship reaches students early, while partnerships with community leaders help extend programs to adults in rural areas. Media partnerships can amplify messages through radio and TV in local languages. International organisations such as UNESCO and IFLA also provide toolkits and training materials that can be adapted locally (UNESCO, 2022; IFLA, 2018). Through these partnerships, libraries can overcome resource limitations and ensure that digital citizenship education is widespread, culturally relevant, and sustainable across the state.

## **CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIBRARIES IN CROSS RIVER STATE**

Despite their potential to combat misinformation and promote digital citizenship, libraries in Cross River State face several structural and operational challenges that limit their effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate policy actions, increased investment, and capacity building to reposition libraries as active agents in the state's digital information ecosystem.

**Inadequate Funding and Infrastructure:** Public, school, and academic libraries in Cross River State continue to suffer from poor funding and weak infrastructure (Omeluzor et al., 2017). Many library buildings are dilapidated, collections are outdated, and ICT facilities such as computers and internet access are either absent or non-functional. Without reliable power supply and connectivity, libraries cannot effectively deliver digital literacy or fact-checking services needed to combat misinformation. This limits their ability to transition from traditional book-lending roles to active centres for media and information literacy.

The digital divide further compounds this problem. Rural LGAs in Cross River State have limited broadband access and fewer library branches compared to Calabar (CRSG, 2020). As a result, citizens who are most vulnerable to misinformation due to low digital skills have the least access to library services. Until funding and infrastructure are addressed, libraries will struggle to fulfil their mandate in the digital age.

**Low Professional Capacity and Policy Support:** Many librarians in Nigeria were trained before the emergence of social media and have not received continuous professional development on media and information literacy or digital citizenship (Akinyemi, Ojo, & Bello, 2020). This creates a skills gap in areas such as fact-checking, content creation, and online pedagogy. Without updated competencies, library staff may find it difficult to design and deliver relevant programs for youths and adults who are active on WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok.

Additionally, there is currently no explicit state policy that positions libraries as key actors in digital literacy or misinformation response (CRSG, 2020). This policy vacuum means library initiatives depend on individual effort rather than institutional strategy. The lack of recognition also affects budget allocation and partnerships, leaving libraries marginalised in state efforts to promote digital citizenship and information integrity.

## **SUMMARY**

This study examined how libraries in Cross River State can address the challenges of misinformation and promote digital citizenship in the social media era. The study found that social media has greatly expanded access to information but has also created an environment where false and misleading content spreads rapidly. In Cross River State, this has affected key areas such as public health, governance, elections, and community relations. Many citizens, especially youths, rely on WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok for information but often lack the skills to verify what they encounter online. The study



established that media and information literacy and digital citizenship provide the necessary frameworks for helping people evaluate information critically and behave responsibly online. Libraries were identified as trusted institutions that can deliver this education through instruction, fact-checking services, content curation, community outreach, and by modelling ethical online behaviour. However, libraries in Cross River State face serious challenges including inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, limited staff training, and lack of policy recognition. To address these, the study recommended increased government investment, modernisation of library facilities, continuous professional development for librarians, and the integration of libraries into the state's digital literacy and civic education strategies. With these interventions, libraries can become active centres for building an informed and responsible citizenry.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, libraries have a critical role to play in ensuring that citizens in Cross River State navigate the digital space safely and responsibly. The rise of social media has transformed communication, but it has also made misinformation a major threat to society. Addressing this problem requires more than just technology; it requires education, trust, and institutions that are committed to the public good. Libraries meet these criteria. They can equip citizens with the skills to identify false information, understand their rights and responsibilities online, and participate constructively in digital spaces. For libraries to fulfil this role in Cross River State, deliberate action is needed. Government must prioritise library development, library managers must redesign services for the digital age, and librarians must be trained with modern competencies. By doing so, libraries will move beyond being places for books to becoming hubs for digital empowerment. This will not only reduce the impact of misinformation but also help build a society where citizens are informed, critical thinkers, and responsible digital participants.

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